

“With Christ, Why Go Back To The Old Life”

Ruth 1:1-19a, Psalm 111, 2Timothy 2:1-13, Luke 17:11-19

Grace, Peace, and Mercy From God Our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Many of us have seen the pictures. Ukrainian refugees fleeing to neighboring countries for safety as Russia invades. Afghan Refugees escaping their country as a hostile government takes power. We have seen pictures of refugees fleeing oppression for a better life in a neighboring country, for freedom, or to save their family.

The latter is why Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons leave their home in Bethlehem for Moab for refuge during a time of severe famine. What they did was common for God’s people. Abraham and Sarah sojourned to Egypt. Jacob and his family ended up in Egypt too because of famine. They fled where they could find food, water, and preserve the family. For Elimelech and Naomi this would be a 10-year sojourn. So, they settle in and make their home in Moab. Their sons would marry Moabite women, Oprah, and Ruth.

However, trouble did not stay in Israel where Naomi and Elimelech left. Trouble followed them to Moab. If living in strange land were bad enough, Naomi becomes a widow upon her husband’s death. Later her two sons also die. Naomi has no visible means of support, except from what she can receive from her two daughters in law.

Finally, when the time came for Naomi to return to Israel she is beaten down by these changes and chances of life. Food was now available in Israel and possibly she could receive support from family there. She encourages her daughters in law to remain in Moab where things are familiar for them. Go back to your people, Naomi bids them.

But Ruth would not stay in her native land. This refugee family had blessed her. She had received much from this family. She had learned and gotten to know the God of Israel, His steadfast love and faithfulness for His people. And that was worth more than her own family, her native county, and life. She desires to go with Naomi to Israel. ***“Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”*** Ruth 1:18
There is no turning back for Ruth.

In our Second lesson for this day, there is no turning for the Apostle Paul. He had received something for more valuable than the life he once lived as well-respected Pharisee. The risen Jesus enlightened Paul with His grace. Jesus sent Paul from a life of Persecuting the Church to a life of Proclaiming the Church’s message, Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins. Even though this brought on all kinds of trials, stoning’s, and imprisonments, Paul could not return to the old life because of the surpassing love of God in Christ Jesus. The old life as a well-respected Pharisee was rubbish in Paul’s mind. Ruth could not return to Moab because life in God’s family was as good as it gets.

Why? ***“If we die with Him, we will also live with him; If we endure with Him, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for cannot deny Himself.”*** 2 Timothy 2:11-13

This is Paul’s baptismal language. Dying and living. In Baptism we are crucified with Christ. We die to sin. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, we in baptism are raised to new life in Christ and adopted into the family of God, the Church. Not like the old life of sin and apart from God. For Ruth the old life was back in Moab, the new life will be as a part of God’s people in Israel.

Our baptized life in Christ never does guarantee a life without Trouble. We face troubles and trials which must we endure, sometimes for doing what is right and following God’s way. Like Naomi, Ruth, and Paul. Sometimes speaking the truth, living the way of God, no matter the consequences. But Christ has promised His presence to bring us through these times. In the end if we endure with Him, we will also reign with him.

As we all know, perhaps you have experienced this too, not all endure. Some deny Him. When the going gets tough some get going, away from God. With hot troubles and temptations they flee and sometimes away from the church.

Then Paul finishes this hymn, ***“If we are faithless, God remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”***

That was the Israel that Ruth came to with her mother-in-law. It was during the time when the Judges. Israel, would deny God, do evil in His sight, then God would allow a foreign nation to defeat His children to discipline them so that they may return to the Lord their God. And return they would. They would cry out to the Lord in repentance, and they would discover that God is indeed a faithful God and a forgiving God. Then God would send one to deliver them, a Judge, Gideon, Deborah.

Yes, even we Christians, even we disciples can act faithless, holding grudges, not forgiving, placing our hope in material riches. In other words, returning to the old life, for Paul returning to the old life a Pharisee, for Ruth going back the Moab. But God cannot deny Himself. He cannot deny His promises. He calls, through the Gospel, He send His Spirit to call us back unto Himself. He forgives and restores. He heals, and He lifts up. And Israel experienced this in the time of the Judges.

It was the same for the one leper we heard about in our gospel. We will hear this gospel when we hold our community thanksgiving service on November 20th here at Bethany where the focus will be on the one leper’s thanksgiving to Jesus. But this this morning this one leper would not go back to the old life of the law which required Him to go to the Priest at the temple for His Physical when Jesus cured His leprosy. This leper instead went to Jesus, to the one who had cleansed him. He fell at Jesus’ feet in a posture of worship. Not only was he healed and cleansed, but he also received so much more. He received life from Jesus. Though once dead,

Jesus drew near to him as well as the other nine, and gave his life back to Him. Not the just physical life of home, family, and community, but the spiritual life of faith, hope, and love.

Jesus has done this for you. The sins that put a wedge between you and God, and you and family, and you and the family of God have been wiped away. Just for you Jesus drew near in His Holy birth, e drew near to you in your Holy baptism, and raised you to new life. You who were once unclean is now clean. As you heard earlier as you made a good and sincere confession. Your sins are forgiven.

So perhaps Ruth, the foreigner's song, Paul the persecutor's song, and leper's song is our song too. One of praise and thanksgiving. Giving praise that we are a people of God adopted into His family in baptism, giving thanks that Jesus, the Son of God who endured all on things and washed away our sins by his shedding of His precious on the cross, Giving Him all honor and glory for all that He has done in heart felt worship.

Remember this, even if you fall back our God is faithful and calls you back through His Spirit, ready to forgive and restore.

Just, maybe, like Naomi, and later Ruth who became a refugee in Israel would become the great grandmother of King David, and later ancestor of the Savior Jesus, we too are refugees. Taking refuge in this place from a world which seems to be wandering farther and farther from God and deeper and deeper into sin. Maybe we have come here looking for some sustenance and nourishment; the food of God's Word, and something to Quench that thirst for the love of Christ Jesus. Maybe we take refuge here because of the peace and rest from a busy distracting life. And it is here we find those and more in the House of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We will go into a world of people looking for hope, many of whom you may know and have relationships with. Maybe you could be their Naomi, their Paul, to show them that what they are seeking is right here. Not just for the life in the here now but in preparation for the life to come when we finally go Home to our fatherland in heaven.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.